



# Diana Abu-Jaber

## Biography

Diana Abu-Jaber was born in 1960 in Syracuse, New York, to a Jordanian father and an American (Irish-German) mother. When she was seven, her family moved to Jordan for two years, and she has lived between the U.S. and Jordan ever since. Abu-Jaber graduated with a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from SUNY Binghamton in 1986. Her first novel, *Arabian Jazz*, published by Harcourt Brace in 1993, won the Oregon Book Award, and was a finalist for the National PEN/Hemingway award. The novel, set in upstate New York, where the author herself grew up, is a humorous look at a first generation Arab-American family migrating between their “Americanized” individual lives and the demands and expectations of the traditional extended family network. The characters lives and experiences demonstrate their displacement, spiritual homelessness, and the hardships of adjustment to a new society. After their mother Nora, who is a white American, dies during her first visit to Jordan, the rest of the Ramoud family is forced to navigate an unfamiliar culture without her.

Abu-Jaber molds these themes together so skillfully that the book as a whole remains witty and entertaining. While the plot centers around the interactions of the Ramouds’ extended family, it also looks at their community as a whole and how a small town in New York treats Arab-Americans. In Jean Grant’s review of the novel in *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, she notes that “Abu-Jaber’s novel will probably do more to convince readers to abandon what media analyst Jack Shaheen calls America’s ‘abhorrence of the Arab’ than any number of speeches or publicity gambits” (Sept. /Oct. 1993).



### Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1960
- \* Writes about Arab-American families and perceptions of Arab culture
- \* First published novel was *Arabian Jazz*

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## Biography continued

Other reviews such as those in *The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* also noted the positive effect that this novel may have on readers' common stereotypes of Arabs because the book will enlighten them about Arab culture.

Abu-Jaber won a National Endowment for the Arts award supporting the writing of her second novel, *Memories of Birth*. She is currently at work on a third novel, for which she has received a Fulbright research award that has allowed her to travel to Jordan, where she has interviewed Palestinian and Jordanian women.

In addition, Abu-Jaber has published numerous short stories electronically and in literary magazines such as *Ploughshares*, the *North American Review*, and *Story*. She has taught at the University of Oregon and UCLA and is currently Writer-in-Residence at Portland State University, where she teaches Creative Writing, Feminist Voices, Middle Eastern Literatures, and Postcolonial Literatures.

## Selected Bibliography

### Works by the author

*Arabian Jazz* (Harcourt, 1993).

*Crescent* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

*The Language of Baklava: A Food Memoir* (Pantheon, 2005).

*Origin* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

### Works about the author

"Arabian Jazz (book review)" (*Publishers Weekly*, 1993).

"Arabian Jazz (book review)" (*New Yorker*, 1993).

De Haven, Tom. "Arabian Jazz (book review)." (*New York Times Book Review*, 1993).

Li, Cherry W. "Arabian Jazz (book review)" (*Library Journal*, 1993).